

A TIME OF FINDING FOR LOST SHEEP

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*"I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away,
and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick:
but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."
Ezekiel 34:16*

IT is a great mercy that God never leaves His church. He has not made a church as a watchmaker constructs a watch, which, after being wound up, is left to depend upon the strength and fitness of the machinery, but He has made a church which, though fitted with the best of machinery, needs His hand every moment to keep it in motion.

He has lighted the lamps, but He walks among the golden candlesticks. He has fixed the pillars of the temple, but His own almighty shoulders are the actual support thereof. He has not left the church to His ministers, but He Himself is the great Bishop and Shepherd of souls. Even if, as some affirm, there were no immediate divine interpositions in the works of providence, we know that there are such interpositions constantly in the works of grace.

We have direct experiential evidence of God's ever watchful care over His church. He does not deal with His people only through instruments, but He Himself takes the church in His own hands. This is His own declaration, "I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Thus does He speak of His vineyard. So, too, in this chapter, for a while, the shepherds had domineered over the flock, evil shepherds, who had crept into the office, fed themselves, but not the sheep.

It would have been an ill day for the church if divine interposition were not the rule of His government, but because it is so, God said, "Away, ye shepherds! I am against you, and I will require My flock at your hands. Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. Away, ye that have dispersed and scattered My flock! I am about to make bare My arm. As ye have proved unworthy servants, your Master Himself is coming, as you have not fed the people of My pastures, and have not gathered together My flock, I Myself will grasp the crook in My own hand."

He speaks in His wrath to the foolish shepherds, yet He mingles His threats with pity for those He elsewhere calls "the flock of slaughter." He says, "I will feed even you, O poor of the flock! I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

Ah, beloved! if the Lord did not interfere in His church continually, the church would cease to exist, if the doctrines of His holy Word had been left to man's teaching, they would by degrees have so degenerated that the church would not have had a particle of truth in its midst. If God had not stretched over His truth the broad aegis of His own omnipotence, truth would have ceased out of the land, and those who profess to be its ministers would all have prophesied lies in the name of the Lord. The preservation of the truth in our midst is owing to the direct and immediate interposition of the Almighty.

And mark it well, the inward witness of the truth in the heart of every individual believer is an instance and evidence of the same unceasing care, inasmuch as only He can apply it to the conscience with quickening power. There is not force enough in the truth to convert souls without the influence of the Holy Spirit. The minister may be a good under-shepherd, and he may endeavor to feed the flock, but

God's flock cannot be fed, nor can God's wandering sheep be gathered home, unless the chief Shepherd, the great and mighty Archbishop, even Jesus Christ, shall interfere and Himself do the work.

The divine interposition of God in the midst of His church is her great bulwark, her hope, her shield, her stay. What we want just now is not so much more shepherds, perhaps, not other shepherds—albeit, when the Lord sends laborers into the field, it is because the crops are to be gathered in—but we need the great Master Himself to visit us and say, “I will do My own work, since ye will not faithfully and fearlessly preach the truth, I will come and interfere, that My Word may be fully and boldly proclaimed.”

Now notice what God has promised to do. In this text there is a character very graphically and minutely described, and we shall look at the four sentences as descriptive of that one character, “*that which was lost; that which was driven away; that which was broken; and that which was sick.*” Then we shall look at the sentences, one by one, as being very possibly *descriptions of four different characters*. We shall also endeavor to speak of the sweet promises appended to each character, and conclude with a solemn warning to “the fat and the strong.”

I. First then, notice the four features of character here, “that which was lost; that which was driven away; that which was broken; that which was sick.” We say that, sometimes, all four of these meet in one individual. To begin with, “**THAT WHICH WAS LOST.**”

Doubtless there are some here who have felt in their hearts the solemn meaning of this wonderful word “lost.” Not only have I no doubt, but I have strong hopes that some souls here present are really and actually lost in their own experience. It may seem a cruel thing that I should wish you to feel yourselves lost, but it is a well-intentioned cruelty, because, if you are lost, this promise is addressed to you, that God will seek “that which was lost.” I shall endeavor, therefore, to tell you how men feel when they are brought to know the dreadful word “lost” as applicable to themselves.

A man is never lost until he is *devoid of all strength*. See you the mariner who has fallen from the ship? As long as those brawny arms of his can stem the current, as long as he can buffet the waves, and hurl them aside with the strong heart of resistance, he gives up nought for lost. Ay, and should his arms become weary, if he can float a little, and with one hand move himself amidst the billows of the deep, he still thinks it is not all over yet. And while there is one particle of strength remaining, his hopes are too buoyant to give himself up for a lost man.

Suppose he grasped a spar, as long as ever those hands of his can, with a death-clutch, keep hold of that floating piece of timber, he does not consider himself lost. Fond hope still whispers in his ear, “Hold on, you are not lost yet, some ship may cross this way, providence may guide its path hither, and you may yet be delivered. Hold on, you are not lost while a sinew retains its might, while there is any vital force in your frame.”

So, soul, you can never say you are lost till you feel in your heart an utter departure of all your strength. Have you been brought to feel that there is nothing which of yourself you can do apart from the strength of the Holy Spirit? There was a time when you could pray, when you could repent, when you could believe, after your own fashion, with your own supposed strength, is that time all passed over now? Are you saying, “I have no power to do any of those things without grace from on high, I would, but cannot pray; I would, but cannot repent; this stubborn heart will not dissolve, although I strive to melt it, this haughty mind will resist the Savior, although I wish to be led in chains of grace a willing captive to my Lord”?

Are you brought to feel that if your salvation depended upon one motion of your soul in the right direction, you would be lost, for you have no spiritual strength? Are you lying down shorn of all your might, bereft of all help and hope in yourself, and do you confess, “I can do nothing without Christ”? Well then, you are one of those whom Christ has come to save.

This death unto the law is the precursor of your being made alive unto God, and a sure sign that grace is at work in your soul. So long as you have one particle of carnal strength, God will never show you His salvation, so long as you think to do one solitary good thing of yourself, or rely upon one

particle of good works for your redemption, you are under the ban and curse of the law, and are not brought to know the covenant plan of mercy, but when you are stripped of every rag of self-righteousness, when you say, "Divinity must work, for humanity has failed, God's will must conquer my will, or else I am lost"—then rejoice, rejoice! though you give yourself up for lost, it is now that God writes you saved. "I will seek that which was lost."

Again, a man is never thoroughly lost until, not only his strength has failed him, but *he has come to his wit's end*. You know how David describes the mariners at sea as rolling to and fro, staggering like drunken men, and at their wit's end. While the captain could devise any scheme for scudding before the wind, or evading the tempest, or nearing the harbor, or arriving at the haven, he gave not up his ship for lost, but when every device had failed—when, after suggesting twenty plans, all laid hold upon as sovereign remedies, but which all failed, he was at his wit's end, or as the margin reads, his wisdom was swallowed up, then he gave himself up to being really lost.

Have I one here who is, in a spiritual sense, at his wit's end? Once he said, "I will do this, and then I shall be saved, I will forego that lust, I will renounce that crime, I will moderate my conduct, I will behave myself more Christian-like, and then I shall be saved." Have you tried these high resolves, and have they failed you? Perhaps you have sought after ceremonies and said, "I will shelter myself in the church, keep her ritual, and zealously obey her rubrics." Yet that has failed you.

You have tried scheme after scheme, only to discover each and all alike abortive, and now you do anxiously inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" Do you say, "I have done all that reason could dictate, I have followed every maxim I could learn, as I ran hither and thither for counsel, I have strained every power mortal can exercise, I have taxed my poor brain till its fitful fancies bewilder me, and alas! all is in vain, what must I do? what shall I do?" Let me tell you.

You are today like a traveler who has lost his way in a wood. You thought that there was a path, and sorely have you been disappointed, until, entangled in the brambles, you have rent your clothes, and your flesh. How sure you did make of some way of escape, but lo! every avenue was blocked up, and you could not get out. You have climbed the highest tree in the forest to see where the end of the dark wood might be, but the further you did look, the more intricate did it appear. At length, your hopes extinguished, your plans defeated, your strength exhausted, your tongue parched, and your eyes smarting, all that you can do is, like the poor traveler in the desert, when his store of water is spent and his power is gone, to lay you down in fell despair and die.

Are you such a one? Have you tried everything, and has everything failed you? Are you now locked up in Giant Despair's castle? If so, I commend to you this blessed truth. Christ came to seek and to save the lost, and oh! could you believe it, what a joyous day this would be to you! You would go out of this house dancing for joy of heart, and saying, "I went in there a poor lost one, but the Shepherd of Israel has sought and found me, for Christ came to seek that which was lost."

Again, a man is not lost until *the door of hope is shut fast*. No man in the world ever gives himself up for lost as long as he has a grain of hope left. Tell the sick man that he must die, for the physician has pronounced his case hopeless, and will he believe you? No, he will cling to the thought that he may yet rally. Has one case of recovery ever been known? Then he hopes his disease may not prove fatal. Has one miraculous cure been wrought? He thinks there may be another, or if not, perhaps that his case may be the first, and so he hopes on, and does not consider his condition desperate.

The poor sinner, when lost, gives all up as hopeless, and he says, "I have no reason to hope that Christ will have mercy upon me. He might save all the rest of the world, but upon me He will never look with eyes of compassion. Here have I been lying for weeks and months by Bethesda's pool, the angel has often stirred the water, I have seen others step in, and they have been saved, my mother has been saved, my brother and my sister have found deliverance, yet here am I just the same as ever.

I go to God's house, but I sit there as an alien, I am not like one of the family, and I know I am lost. It seems as if the ear of God were shut against my prayer, when I cry to Him, He disregards the voice of

my groaning. Alas! that my prayer is like the sacrifice of the wicked, an abomination to the Lord. I feel that He has cast me out of His sight, and that I am condemned already!”

What, then, I ask, is your case too hard for Him? “Nay,” say you, “but He will not save me. I have called so long, I have cried so often, surely God has forgotten to be gracious, I am not one of His elect, He has shut up His bowels of compassion, and I never can be saved.” Hear this, my friend, if you feel all that, let me solemnly assure you, in God’s name, that though lost in yourself, Christ came to save you.

Would to God that all of you who hear me this day were either agonizing over your being lost, or rejoicing that you are found. You would then be equally safe, if not equally happy. I had rather, O you careless sinners, that terrors took hold upon you and fears compassed you about, than that you should be dancing on the mountains of folly and reveling in your sins, unconscious of danger! Know this, you lighthearted, you giddy and gay ones, the hour of your damnation draws nigh, but as for you, who are broken in pieces, sighing and groaning because you think your case is hopeless, let me tell you, as God’s ambassador, that your case is not *hopeless*, but *hopeful*.

You may call to mind, like Jeremiah, your affliction and your misery, “the wormwood and the gall,” and say with him, “Therefore have I hope.” Have I faithfully described you? Will you answer to your name as a prodigal son, as a lost child? Then, lost as you are, you have a Father. So lost as to need finding, so lost as to need saving, I think I hear a Father’s yearnings over you, “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.”

I think I hear the Savior’s voice saying, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” A vision flits before my eyes, I think I see the blessed Jesus in shepherd’s garb, with staff in hand, bearing on His shoulders a lost sheep whom He has this morning recovered. Just now, the poor sheep was wandering in the wilderness in a solitary way, now he is laid on the everlasting shoulders, guarded by Omnipotent power, and kept secure from harm. Happy soul! The angels rejoice over you, though your heart has not yet realized the sense of security which could give you joy.

There is another characteristic of the man who feels himself lost, more horrible than those I have mentioned. Waking to a consciousness that he is lost, he not only beholds the gate of Hope shut, but *the gate of Hell opened*. Ah, my Friends! I speak now as one who should know, as one who has felt in his own soul what his lips describe. I have passed through that experience which I have told you heretofore, and this have I likewise known.

Well do I remember, after many a month of prayer without an answer from God, when faith I had none, and my hope had given up the ghost, I thought God would never save me, and just then I thought the gate of hell were opened before my soul, for if ever a soul did experience a foretaste of perdition, I think I did, and I believe many of you experienced the same before you found peace with God. You knew you were not in hell, and yet you thought even that almost preferable to your condition, you were in such dread suspense. Sometimes there was a glimmer of hope, but that only made your darkness more visible.

As John Bunyan has it, the hell drum was beating in your ears, you heard it from morning till night, and from night till morning—“Lost, lost, lost! you will soon be in hell!” Do you not remember when you did walk the earth and think that every tuft of grass would be as the mouth of hell to open and swallow you up—when you could not sleep for frightful dreams, and did wake and feel the very terror which haunted you in your night visions? Your poor conscience was lashed by the whip of the law, and while your wounds were smarting, you did cry, “O God! will You never save me? The sorrows of death have compassed me about, and all Your billows have gone over me.”

Do you not remember when, like David, all your bones were out of joint and you said, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” but there was no answer? And moreover, Satan suggested a reply, “What! renew a right spirit in YOU! You are the worst wretch who ever lived, your death warrant is signed, the kindling is burning now that will consume you, the chains are already

forged to bind you forever, and you shall be with me shut up under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

Now, is there such a one here, one to whom hell’s gates are opened, upon whom fiends seem perpetually hissing, one who is brought to the black land of confusion, to the valley of the shadow of death, where not only is there no hope, but where the portending clouds seem to be gathered round him? Let him take heart, Christ has come to save such lost souls, and as surely as the devil is let loose upon you in this way, Christ will bind him yet, He will break the teeth of the oppressor, and will take you, His poor lost sheep, out of the jaw of the lion and the paw of the bear! Are you so lost? Then here is the promise for you, “I will seek that which was lost.”

But you say, “Sir, I have had too long a trial to think it possible, I have attended your ministry, and other ministries, for many a long year. Sometimes I have thought that surely I might be saved, but ah! it is of no use. You may speak of all the promises you like, they have nothing to do with me, I write my name down among the lost, and charm you never so wisely, I am like the deaf adder—never, never to be comforted! It is all over now, I am locked up in this iron cage of despair—lost, lost! beyond all hope, and I cannot believe what you say.”

Ah, poor soul! but just notice what the text says, “I will seek that which was lost.” I have been seeking you for many a Sabbath, and so have other ministers, but we have never found you, but God’s seeking is very different from ours. If I could, I would come to you, with these weeping eyes of mine, and say, “Poor sinner, do take heart.” I would go down upon my knees with you, and offer my supplications for you that you might believe in Christ, but I know it would avail little, unless my Master sought you.

The under-shepherds have been after you many a day, but they could not find you. But God knows, as we do not know, where you are. If you are in the deepest pit in the forest, His almighty eye can see to the bottom. Ay, and in one of the favored moments of the day of salvation, that time accepted, He will send home a promise so sweetly that all your fetters shall break off in an instant, your night shall be scattered, your dawn begin, and He will give you the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Believe now, and you shall be comforted now, for the time of faith is the time of comfort.

Our text gives us a second characteristic of lost sheep, “THAT WHICH WAS DRIVEN AWAY.” I wish to particularize this morning, because I have begged the Lord to send His arrows home personally, even to three or four, rather than to let me shoot them in amongst you, and strike no hearts at all. Souls there are, not only lost, but driven away.

“I could tell you of a time,” says one, “when I had a hope of heaven, or at least, I thought I had. I groaned, and prayed, and strove, and one Sabbath day—I shall never forget it—I stepped into the house of God, and during the reading of a chapter or the singing of a hymn, I fondly thought that I had seen Christ, and had believed in Him, but oh! it was only for a moment, I was only permitted just to look into the well of living water, no one came to draw water for me and give me a drink. I thought for a single second, ‘Now is the hour of my salvation,’ something said within my heart, ‘Now is the appointed time, today is the day of salvation,’ and I almost began to smile within myself at the thought that I had found the Lord. But sir, I was driven away, and I dare not go again. I was once very near being a believer, I was just upon the edge of having faith in Christ, but it only makes the night darker to think I once saw a star, for I was driven away.”

Now there are different ways in which poor sinners are driven away, and in any case it is the devil’s work. *Sometimes unbelief does it*, the sinner sees Christ on the cross, the blood flowing from His head and hands and feet and side, and he thinks—

*“Oh! could I but believe,
Then all would easy be.”*

He thinks of the happy effects that would follow faith in Christ, and something says within him—

*“Venture on Him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude.”*

And he is just going to do it, when suddenly there comes a great black thought, “What, you! you have no right to come, away with you!” He has just pressed through the crowd, and is going to touch the hem of his Master’s garment, but ere his finger reaches it, someone has pushed before him, and he goes away abashed, and all the more so to think that he should have ever had the presumption, as he deems it, to hope for salvation. Unbelief has pushed many a sinner away from Christ just when he was coming, and has kept him away for a long time.

Sometimes legal preachers drive souls away, they preach a Gospel so much mixed up with law, so united with the doings of man, that the poor soul just coming to Christ gets driven away. And even some of God’s true ministers—ay, the very best of them—sometimes drive poor sinners away from Christ. When they speak of the experience of the saint, the poor sinner writes bitter things against himself because he does not feel that he comes up to the experience which some of the Lord’s children have had.

Ah! we cannot always tell when we are driving poor souls away from Christ. Often, when we think we are wooing them, we are really driving them away, when we would be winning them to the Savior, some harsh expression of ours frightens sinners away from Him. Ah, poor soul! have you been driven away? Do you understand and sympathize with what I have said?

Before I knew the Lord, I could declare that I was driven away. Once, under a powerful sermon, my heart shook within me, and was dissolved in the midst of my bowels, I thought I would seek the Lord and I bowed my knee and wrestled, and poured out my heart before Him. I ventured within His sanctuary to hear His Word, hoping that in some favored hour He would send a precious promise to my consolation, but ah! that wretched afternoon I heard a sermon wherein Christ was not, I had no longer any hope.

I would have sipped at that fountain, but I was driven away, I felt that I would have believed in Christ, and I longed and sighed for Him. But ah! that dreadful sermon, and those dreadful things that were uttered, my poor soul knew not what was truth, or what was error, but I thought the man was surely preaching the truth, and I was driven back. I dared not go, I could not believe, I could not lay hold on Christ, I was shut out, if no one else was.

Is there someone here who has been thus driven away? I may have done it, and I will weep before God in secret on account of it. But let me cheer you. Hear this, “I will bring again that which was driven away.” As surely as you ever did come once, you will be brought back again, that heavenly hour shall once more return, that blessed day shall dawn afresh, Christ shall appear, and His love and mercy shall be bestowed on you. He has drawn you once, and He will draw you again, for God never fails. He may, for wise ends and purposes, suffer you to be driven away once, but He will ultimately bring you to Himself, for He has said, “I will bring again that which was driven away.”

The other two points have, I think, something to do with the driving away, “I WILL BIND UP THAT WHICH WAS BROKEN.” This, I think, refers to those who have been broken by being driven away, the shepherds smote them so hard that they even broke their bones.

How many have there been who, when they thought they had found Christ, but were driven away, have felt from that moment that they were broken, that they were more sorely wounded than ever they had been! They did entertain some little hope before, that Christ might look upon them with love, but now they are broken to pieces, and that breaking, together with the breaking of the Holy Spirit, which has ground them as in the mortar and pestle of conviction, has so broken them that they feel utterly destroyed.

Besides the sickness of sin, they have upon them a sickness partly engendered by the strokes of those who drove them away. Then comes in most blessedly the fourth promise of the text, “I WILL STRENGTHEN THAT WHICH WAS SICK.”

I may be taking an extreme case when I suppose one character in whom those four points meet. Have I anyone here in such a position—not only “lost,” not only “driven away,” but “broken” and “sick”? Your head has begun to whirl, you know not how it is, but so strongly have these convictions got hold of you that your very mind seems to suffer from them—a mystery to yourself, you cannot tell where you are. Some say that you are mad, and you think within yourself that they have good ground for the suspicion. You are sick of your existence, and almost ready to take your life. A terrible giddiness has seized you, as if a hell were kindled in your breast, to be the prelude of despair and irrevocable destruction—the first notes of the “Miserere” of eternal woe.

Are you reduced to such a terrible extremity? Are you sick as well as broken and driven away and lost? Hear this, “I will seek that which was lost.” Can you not believe that God’s promise is true? “I will bring again that which was driven away.” Do you think that God’s “*I will*” stands for nothing? “I will bind up that which was broken.” Can you not implicitly believe what God so absolutely affirms? “I will strengthen that which was sick.”

O sick one, God give you grace to understand that He means what He says, and to believe that He will do what He promises! Come now, is there one here in whom all these troubles meet? Let him lift up his head with joy from this moment, for Jesus Christ has come to save him, and his sighing shall, ere long, be exchanged for songs of thanksgiving.

II. Now, very briefly, let me hint at the four characters separately.

First, “*that which was lost.*” This, of course, is the awakened sinner who is made to know that, in Adam, he is lost and by his own sins he is utterly ruined and destroyed. Such a one has here the divine authority for hope that God will seek him, and that he shall yet be saved.

“*I will bring again that which was driven away.*” This refers to the backslider who has been driven away from God by sin. Strong temptations have goaded him to follow the propensities of his own wicked will. Poor backslider, God will restore you. Oh! I could tell of some here who have greatly and grievously departed from the paths of righteousness, and the leanness will testify that they have been driven from the pastures. Let me say to you, in God’s name, that He will bring back “that which was driven away.”

“Oh! but,” you say, “six years ago I dishonored my profession, and ever since I have been as one estranged from his people.” Ay, but if you are the Lord’s child, if it were sixty years, He would bring you back with weeping and lamentation unto Zion. “Oh, sir, but I have so disgraced the cause!” Turn you, turn you at His bidding, God invites you to come. My backsliding brother, my backsliding sister, I will not condemn you, I may become a backslider too, and the best of these who now stand fast by Jesus may be likewise, “overtaken in a fault.”

You are condemned enough in your own heart, I would not that you should “be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” “Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.” ’Tis even so with our God. “Yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.”

Come, Ephraim, you have been a stubborn child, still your Father bids you come home. Come, Prodigal, you have wasted your substance, yet a Father’s loving eyes have beheld you when you were a great way off, come, His breast heaves with love for you. Come, you driven-away one, come to Him, He loved you before you loved Him, and though you did rebel against Him, He has never ceased to love you. Though you have sinned much, His loving heart is immutably the same. Oh! believe in His goodness in the teeth of your own unworthiness, so shall you be comforted, and the word on which He has caused you to hope shall be fulfilled, “I will bring again that which was driven away.”

The next character is *the broken one*. The child of God is often broken, especially if he has been a backslider, he is sure to have broken bones, and he is likely to walk halting all the rest of his days. Or

the believer may be broken by trouble, by affliction, or by assaults of the enemy, he may be broken on account of the inbred sin manifested to him by the Holy Spirit. But broken one, God will help you, for He has said, "I will bind up that which was broken." Sweet thought! Precious promises are the ligatures with which God Himself binds up broken bones. Marvelous Surgeon! God Almighty Himself bowing down from heaven to put the heavenly liniment and the fair white linen of a Savior's righteousness round about the wounded spirit! Broken one, rejoice, God says, "I will bind up that which was broken."

Lastly, there are *the sick ones*, and many such there are among the Lord's people. Their faith is weak, their prayers are not so spiritual and fervent as they desire, there is a chill about them, or else a heat of feverish anxiety, their hearts often palpitate with gloomy fears and sad forebodings, they are not so healthy as they desire to be before God, they long for that perfect love which casts out fear.

Ay, then, do you feel that sickness, saint, this morning? Say not because you are sick that God will let you die. No, for He says, "I will strengthen that which was sick." So then, saints in all your distresses, sinners in all your sins, here are exceedingly great promises ministered unto you this morning, and may the Holy Spirit show you their infinite value, and apply then to you with demonstration and with power!

How unspeakable the satisfaction to a poor sinner when he hears the physician minutely describe all his ailments! But to hear him speak with confidence that however painful, no symptom is beyond his skill, how the patient will brighten up! Your case, my brother, is more cheering still. Have you not sometimes heard your doctor say, "When you recover from this sickness, you will be better than you were before"? Well now, think how far God's mercies exceed our miseries, how far His cure extends beyond our maladies, how sure He is to do for His people exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!

Then, despairing soul, though you have all four maladies, you shall have all four promises. If you are a member of His family, for every affliction and every chastisement you shall get so many peaceable fruits of righteousness, so that you will afterwards kiss the rod, and subscribe to David's testimony, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." And mark you this—in the fulfillment of God's promises you shall receive *double* for all your distresses.

And now, can I say any more? Have I not gone to the uttermost case in the application of my text? Are there any poor souls that I have not reached? Then let me try once again. My dear friends, do you know yourselves to be lost and ruined by the fall? Do you feel that you are utterly undone, ruined, and lost without Christ? Well then, in His name I solemnly declare this great truth of the Gospel, that all who know this and feel it may confidently believe that there is salvation for them. The only proof that I can give you that you shall be saints is that you feel that you are now sinners. O poor sin-sick soul, I thank God that you are afflicted with this sickness, for now you will have recourse to the Physician! O poor sinner, I thank God that you know yourself to be poor, for God will make you rich.

But as for such as you are as the text says, "the fat and the strong," you who boast that you are good enough, and have need of nothing, go your own way, you want no Gospel, and I have none to preach to you, you who are so good and excellent, you want no Christ to save you, you will despise the man who comes in Christ's name to preach free, unmerited, sovereign love.

And what if you do? Does he care for your contempt? Not one whit. Reproach will sit lightly on him if he may but win souls to be found in Christ at last. If you need not the medicine, spurn it if you please, but you are fools for your pains, and if you want it not for yourselves, if you are so whole that you need not the physician, hoot him not while he goes to attend upon those who feel their danger to be imminent.

Grumble not that I preach no Gospel to you, for you want it not. You are as good as you can be—in fact, rather better than most Christians in your own opinion, you are no cants, no hypocrites. You may want a patch or two of religion to make you all right at last. Your garments are white and courtly, they only want a little brushing to take the dust off.

Alas for you, sirs, hell is built for such good people as you are! You shall find no place in heaven, its blessed mansions are prepared for sinners saved by grace, and hell's dark dungeons remain for those

who reject Christ, despise mercy, and scorn to sue for pardon because they deem themselves too good, too holy, too excellent to need a Savior!

I say again, as for you who are fat and strong, God will feed you with judgment. You think to stand by your own works, but your best works will destroy you. You shall appear before God in your own characters, and they shall ruin you forever. You think your own merits will suffice, and that God will bestow on you a reward. Yes, and He will reward you, and a terrible recompense it shall be when you shall find yourselves receiving what you have earned—tribulation, wrath, and destruction from the presence of the Lord your God.

Your consciences tell you that what I speak is true. You may despise the warning now, but in the silent moments of your sober thought it shall cling to you and haunt you. When your guilt recoils on your memory, when your heart and flesh fail, and your reason totters at the prospect of a dread hereafter, you will howl with misery and cry out, “Woe worth the day!”

Now you lost and ruined, come to Jesus, you broken sinners, believe in Jesus, you that are bruised and mangled by the fall, come to Jesus.

*“Come ye needy, come and welcome,
God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ, and buy.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth,
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you,
'Tis His Spirit’s rising beam.”*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.